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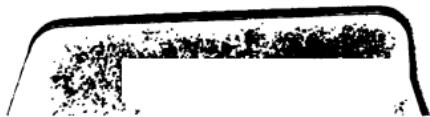
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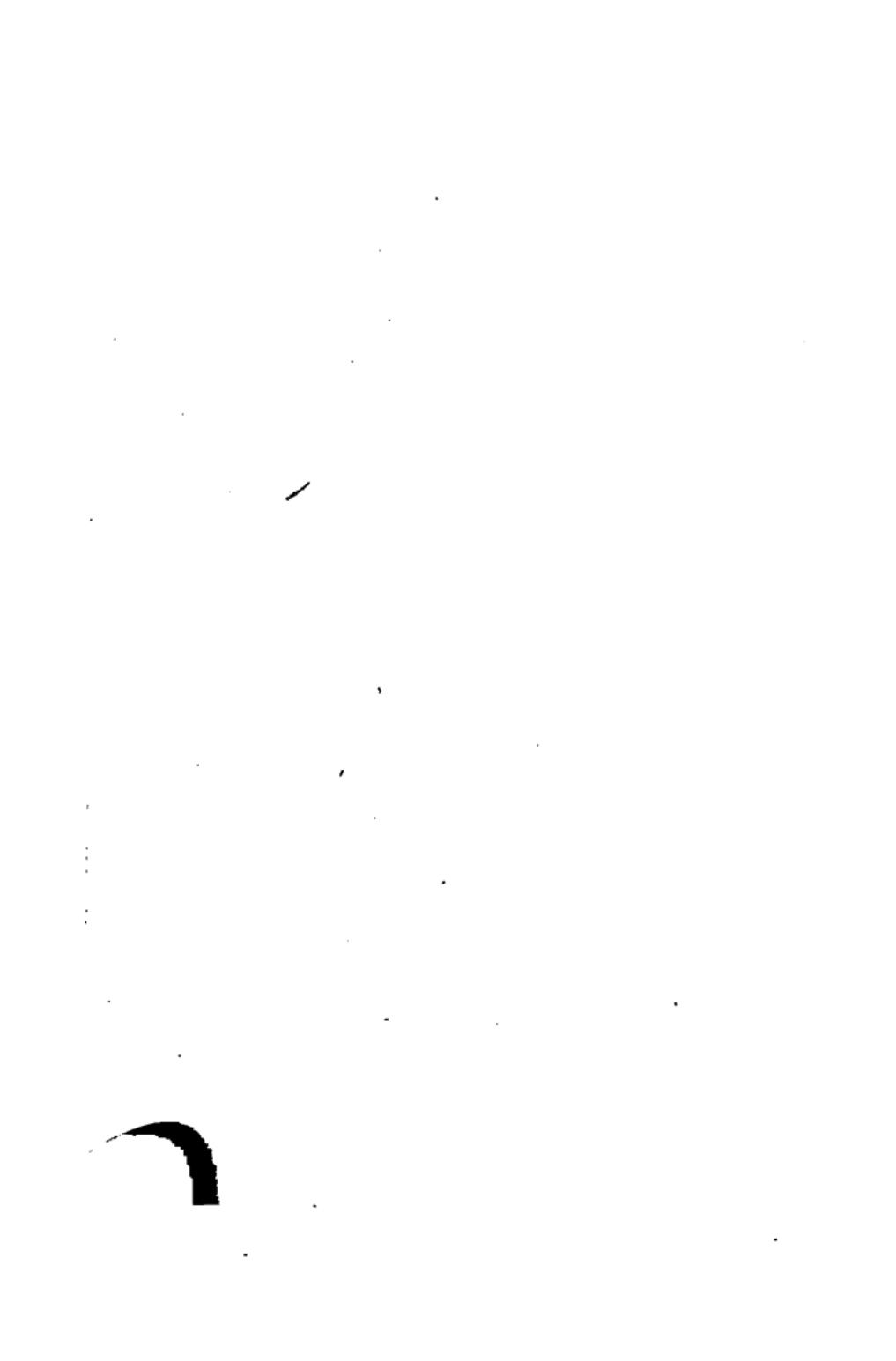
THOUGHTS
OF
THE DAY.



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THOUGHTS OF THE DAY;

OR,

THE WORLD AND THE CROSS.

LONDON:
JAMES NISBET AND CO., 21 BERNERS STREET.
M.DCCC.LXXXI.

EDINBURGH:
PRINTED BY BALLANTYNE AND COMPANY,
PAUL'S WORK.



P R E F A C E.

THESE thoughts are spontaneous ones, and not the result of care and study; neither do they pretend to close argument or reasoning, but rather to elucidate self-convictions and mental truths. As such, perhaps they will find their way to some hearts, and soothe some spirits.

January 2, 1863.



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CHAPTER I.

THE PATH OF SORROW.

“The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown.”

COWPER.

MANY persons of light and buoyant temperament seem to walk here below in eternal sunshine and thoughtless gaiety; diffusing laughter and merriment around them, and almost ignoring the existence of anything else. They understand not the poet's words.

To earnest and serious minds the tone of constant mirth and levity is distasteful as well as unreal. Peaceful and serene in

sorrow ; and cheerful, thankful, and joyous-hearted at all times, they would wish to be ; but they know that they have a cross to carry, and a work to do on earth, and they cannot trifle with folly.

But, oh, to how many is not lightness of mind and of manners a snare and a hindrance ! How many inquirers after truth are perplexed and even driven back by the pleasant folly, the amusing ways, the free talk and lax notions of those who ought to be faithful guides to others !

To many it is a trial of another kind. The anxious mother sees her earnest endeavours to lead her children right, overthrown and defeated ; and, perhaps, in one short hour or day her labour of years undone, and an antagonistic influence set up in their hearts.

And how many young minds, earnestly

seeking after what is right, and willing to bear the Christian's cross in all sincerity, have had their courage damped, and their faith disturbed, by thoughtlessness of talk and heedlessness in breaking down the finer but most real distinctions between right and wrong !

Many of these young earnest-minded inquirers have had their own high standard of principle thrown down, their peace of mind destroyed, their moral and mental sensibilities wounded, whilst their day-by-day service and closer walk with God is ridiculed and derided.

It is more difficult to stand against compromising, than against open war; more difficult to meet the enemy boldly, when we know not whether it be friend or foe that we go out to meet.

But oh, ye faint-hearted and discon-

certed ones! go on; lose not your great reward. Bear meekly your cross in whatever form it comes to you, and carry it bravely; and as you go onward, brighter light and greater strength will encircle round the path that now seems so dark and dim to you. And is there not need that you should be tried? and if you are indeed God's children, that your faith should be proved? Can you not bear and forbear a little for His sake? If you keep close to Him and to His written word, you will have no doubts about what you ought to be, or what you ought to do; and the shafts of ridicule, or the still more perilous ones of this world's flattery, will fall harmlessly around you.

And ye thoughtless and, perhaps, unconscious tempters of your Master's flock, ye ruthless worriers of Christ's little ones, ye

pitiless laughter-loving worldlings ! pause ere too late ; pause in your miserable folly — save yourselves from eternal regrets ; and, stretching out arms of love and words of moral help, let us in future walk together more like fellow-travellers and fellow-mortals, all hastening in the same direction, all bound alike to the same eternal home.

CHAPTER II.

“I WAS WOUNDED IN THE HOUSE OF MY
FRIENDS.”

THERE are many passages or quotations of Scripture which sound somewhat strangely as well as quaintly to our ears, perhaps even overstrained and unnatural, until a time comes when we feel and understand them from our own personal experience. Then, by a kind of reaction, we readily adopt and identify ourselves with the very idea that we had formerly shrunk back from.

This passage of Scripture, “I was wounded in the house of my friends,”

comes gratefully and opportunely to our minds, when unexpected defection in those we love and trust has struck us dumb; and the words express our own case and feelings better than we can express them ourselves.

When we find that those we have so long cherished in our hearts and loved, are no longer true to us, but changed and fickle; the tenderness of years forgotten; the affection we counted on as our own for ever, scattered and gone; when unkindness and broken faith come instead from those in whom we had implicit trust — then, in our disappointed hopes, in our mistaken confidence, how true to our hearts is the expression, “I am wounded in the house of my friends!”

The sensitive mind has no defence against the smarts of unkindness in this

14 WOUNDED IN THE HOUSE OF MY FRIENDS.

cold and cruel world, and must do the best it can to hide its wounds from unsympathising eyes ; but, loyal to the end, it would not exchange its own poor bleeding heart with their more callous ones.

“ My heart is wounded deep,
And wounded by my friends ;
I have been true to them,
And this is their amends.

“ The thoughtless hurrying on,
Secure themselves and gay,
Heed not the quiet ones
Who tread life’s narrow way.

“ The steadfast walk alone ;
To them it may be given
To meet no faith on earth,
But find it up in heaven.”

CHAPTER III.

“THEY ARE ALL ALIKE.”

THIS is a common saying, and passes current with many, and is an easy way of settling matters when anything goes wrong. “Oh, they are all alike!” But popular as this saying may be, it is as unjust as it is unsound, and sets common sense as well as justice at defiance, excusing individuals by inculpating a whole class, and confounding together the innocent and guilty.

And religion teaches us the solemn truth that all are not alike now, and that all will not be alike hereafter. Is it not

one of the trials of our faith here below, that bad and good appear so much alike, and that man's judgment awards praise and blame so often wrongfully;—that the wheat and the tares grow up together, and that the tares overgrow the wheat?

And is it not the comfort of God's people here, that He can discern between the good and the bad; that He knows His own; and that all are not alike in His sight?

Look at the faithful servant and the mere time-server, the obedient child and the disobedient, the honest and conscientious, and the false and deceitful,—are they all alike? The patient and the impatient, the selfish and the long-enduring, the giddy and trifling, and the serious and thoughtful,—are these alike? Is eye-service as valuable as heart-devotion? Is

what is fair in the sight of man always so in the sight of God ?

See the half-starved but virtuous girl, her hands and eyes wearing out with hopeless needlework, no friend, perhaps, on earth to help her, her only solace her upward cry to Heaven, her only hope that God sees her !—then look at her bold and flaunting neighbour transgressing every law of God and man, and hardened in sin and shame !

See the faithful daughter watching by her mother's side, and the absent one grudging any service or help ! Harken to the drunken brawls echoing down the streets, and consider the patient endurance of many a suffering wife and mother bending still at midnight over her hard task-work ! Are these alike ?

Oh, what would become of the children

of God in this world, were it not for faith in His promise, that He knows now, and that He will hereafter acknowledge them as His own, His elect, redeemed for ever?

CHAPTER IV.

HIGH STANDARD OF PRINCIPLE NECESSARY WITH CHILDREN.

WE shall not do well by our children, unless we bring them up in principles of pure and strict morality.

Religion demands this of us ; and as we shall certainly always fall short of our best endeavours, what becomes of us and of our children should our standard of right and wrong be a low or a false one ?

Many parents follow suit one with another, without troubling their minds about high principles of action, or endeavouring to enlighten themselves as to their real duty towards their children ; and the con-

sequences of this are sad and fearful, and multiplying around us in the rising generation day by day.

And yet we must deny or discredit a good deal of what we profess most to revere, before we can lower the standard of high principles of action ; and as every Christian is bound to keep them up, there must be something lax in ourselves before we can ever wish to do otherwise.

The happiness of children depends upon their love and obedience to their parents ; rebellion, sullenness, and discontent, are the sure and natural consequences of a divided rule—a contest between child and parent. And such is the force of moral habit, that few children brought up in early subjection ever care to think of anything else.

Obedience and Truth seem to be the

virtues required of children, and all other virtues follow in due time in the train of these.

Implicit obedience is a child's first duty; in early childhood his parents stand to him in the place of God; and as his intellect opens, and his perceptions of right and wrong develop, he finds that his duty to God involves duty to his parents also. From thenceforth parents and children may act together,—the child minding its parents, and the parents faithfully and untiringly training the minds of their children in right directions.

The Christian parent will regard his parental authority as a sacred trust, as a means given him of bringing up his children in the fear and love of God; and he will never knowingly weaken it or fritter it away.

22 HIGH STANDARD OF PRINCIPLE, ETC.

It is the fashion, however, in the present day, for parents to play the light and easy with their children ; to seek their love only, without their reverence ; little knowing the tottering basis they build upon, when, leaving the tried and plain path of duty, they follow popular and fanciful ways. Such heed not either the blessings entailed on veneration and respect, of which they deprive their children, and which are the safeguard of youth, their stronghold in temptation, and their solace in after life.

CHAPTER V.

THE TWO GREAT DOCTRINES.

Two great doctrines of faith and practice stand forward prominently and pre-eminently in the New Testament,—the doctrine of the atonement for sin, and the doctrine of the new birth, or divine regeneration of the soul of man.

In the Bible, these two great doctrines are linked indissolubly and inseparably together, so that one cannot faithfully be preached without the other, if we keep strictly to the Word of God.

In His blessed Word we are taught plainly and positively that in Christ alone

we have redemption, and that His blood was shed to save us. But we are also told, as plainly and as forcibly, that if we have “not the Spirit of Christ,” we are “none of His,” and, consequently, not partakers in His great atonement. We are assured that to be so, our hearts must be renewed or born again by the Holy Spirit of God, which is promised faithfully to all who seek it; and, moreover, we are emphatically told that the evidence of this change of heart is in our holier life and closer walk with God.

The results of these two divine doctrines are—faith in Christ, peace of mind, and a holy walk on earth; for the believer in Christ’s atonement must be renewed in heart and life to *know* that he belongs to Christ; and the renewed and conscientious Christian looks to the cross of Christ,

and to that alone, for his hope of salvation.

In the blessed Bible the one doctrine is not taught without the other; the most glorious expositions of the free grace of God, and of the cross of Christ, are interwoven with the most solemn warnings that these great promises belong to Christ's faithful followers only,—to those who are in Him and waiting upon Him.

And again;—the teachings of regeneration and sanctification are always looking back to, and glorying in their one great centre and stronghold, their fountain of life and hope—the love of God shewn to man in the cross of Christ.

Why do men, then, so roughly tear asunder what God has thus joined together, and by preaching these two glorious doctrines separately and even anta-

gonistically, delude their hearers with the name of “gospel,” whilst they purposely keep back part of its message from them.

The fruits of these doctrines taught together, as we find them in the Bible, are peace of mind and growth in spiritual grace and knowledge; but when these doctrines are divided, and preached apart the one from the other, the results are often manifestly such as might be expected from man’s presumption in thus altering the Divine order and arrangement. Party spirit, numbering of converts, zeal enough and activity, sometimes too much, may be the present fruits of such one-sided teaching; but what of the after product? the future growths?

Perhaps in a few years, already unbalanced and unhinged, it may end in entire change of doctrine instead of a steady

increase in Christian faith and practice ; perhaps in the adoption of a new set of ideas altogether, with increased sectarian spirit, and a transfer of the old fervour and zeal to the new cause.

And what becomes of their converts in such cases ? They also, if they have not already deserted their teachers, must follow them through each new phase.

This is certainly not the best or shortest way to truth, or to the knowledge of vital religion. Nevertheless, we joyfully believe that all will be brought eventually to Christ's fold above, who are seeking Him in earnest, although in error, here ; and at His right hand we shall surely welcome and rejoice over many who had strayed far away from us on earth.

CHAPTER VI.

PURPOSE LIKE ; OR, WANDERING STARS.

EVERY one born into this world, whether of high or of low degree, has his own proper place in it; each his own work, and each a centre from whence he may stretch out far and wide at will. But we should not altogether desert our own allotted orbit or sphere, for in that we most assuredly have our own personal and appointed work to do.

It is an infirmity of human nature to be fain to neglect the present opportunity, and to seek instead after great things afar off, where, perhaps, we shall never reach

them, until our eye sometimes can see clearly only in the distance, and our feet slip and slide in present mist and darkness of our own creation.

Purpose-like people do more real work and good in their generation than erratic spirits, because they oftener really do what they attempt to do, whilst the others scatter their thoughts to the winds, and finish nothing. The old proverb is true, that a rolling stone gathers no moss; to which might be added, that the rolling stones make most noise.

And let not any imagine that they can lawfully neglect their known duty in order to carry out private plans and theories, for no self-imposed task can atone for the neglect of our personal duty; and it is obvious that no aspirations of our own can preclude us, as Christians,

from our obligation to obey the positive commandments of our Lord and Master.

Therefore, when duty and inclination seem to clash together, the latter must give way, how great soever the temptation, however bitter the relinquishment. Yes, even though it be to give up our favourite scheme, to exchange activity for dull routine, a brilliant future for a life of mourning. Such are the daily sacrifices of Christians, and we must not do evil that good may come.

It should also be borne in mind that far more mental energy is required to carry out any work solely from a sense of duty than when the stimulus of excitement is superadded to this motive.

Excitement acts as a very powerful and all-prevailing stimulant to our energies, being the mainspring of most of our

actions, and at the bottom of many of our motives. It impels multitudes to do what mere love and duty never would have made them do; and it rouses up and keeps in action many who, without the pressure of excitement, would never lift a helping hand or lend a willing ear.

But weigh them together, the impulse of duty and the workings of excitement, and the latter falls short in the balance, and bubbles away in empty froth. And which of these two motives, duty or excitement, is the purest, the highest, the most unselfish? Or rather, which is best, the praise of man or the service of God? We are told, also, that our life is hidden here, and our reward hereafter; and that to the patient and long-enduring the promises are made.

Some, again, seem called out and chosen for high spheres of action; many stand

apart and aloof by themselves; others are raised up to do some great deed; some even fulfil God's appointed decrees unknowingly, and work out His will in spite of themselves. All these, like comets, are bright, and sometimes dazzling even in their brightness; but their orbits also, though comparatively erratic, are as surely ordained by Providence, as the more fixed tracks of the stars and planets.

Leave these alone;—we speak not of them, but of those who follow their own inclinations unmindful of the calls of duty, or who, under the fallacious plea of fulfilling their destiny, are merely bent on following their own devices.

CHAPTER VII.

BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS.

OF the certain, though gradual, effect of laxity of manners and conduct in undermining morality and religion, and in breaking down the barriers of distinction between right and wrong, we have ample proof in the present day, when our standard of principle is often so much lowered as to be lost to view, and our doors are opened to a flood of confusion and evil of every kind.

Haste to the rescue, all ye true-hearted, for the enemy is at hand, and we have traitors within our gates !

C

34 BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS.

One of the ways most in vogue, and most insidious, of breaking down the barriers, is by insincerity and untruth in the introduction of spurious virtues and good qualities, and by passing these off with much puffing and praise as genuine. It is often difficult even for the clear-sighted to discriminate between the true and the false ones, the spurious and the genuine, so alike outwardly are they, though so utterly different in reality. It requires an experienced eye to distinguish between them; the young and unwary are often deceived—some are puzzled, and others grieved.

The number of spurious good qualities passed off in this way by mere puffing and praising is amazing; the fashionable market literally abounds with them; no wonder, then, if there be confusion in

such quarters between good and evil, right and wrong.

Many meanwhile are looking carelessly on ; some are angry, and do more harm than good ; others secretly encourage the deception ; and, oh, how few act faithfully and wisely in the matter !

From beginning to end, the uniform teaching of the Bible is that of reality and truth ; there is no admixture of spurious goodness here, and the same deep holy teaching pervades the whole volume, and is richly scattered throughout it. And unless our moral scale, our principles of action, be fairly balanced, they are of no avail ; thus, undue appreciation, or *vice versa*, undue depreciation, upsets the whole scale, and deranges and brings it down at once.

One of the fallacies of the present day

36 BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS.

is the misuse of the word “love,” and the substitution in its stead of a lax, loose good-nature, which often, acting in antagonism to what is fair and right, is abundant in unripe and unhealthy fruits.

Surely it needs only to know what true Christian love is and ought to be, to mark the difference between it and that mere good-nature and natural philanthropy or kind-heartedness, which so often takes its name and affects its attributes, whilst glossing over and ever encouraging and promoting sin.

Many forget in these days that the Bible inculcates the fear of God as well as the love of God; we are taught there that the fear of God “is the beginning of wisdom,” and that the love of God, perfected and without fear, is the blessed *after-fruit* and result of this. Some, heed-

less altogether of this teaching, substitute for it an unsound sentimental theory of their own, and talk much of love, whilst they know little of this divine attribute.

How beautifully is true Christian love embodied in that glorious message, "Peace on earth, and goodwill to man," and it is the first fruits and the last fruits of that message in the heart of renewed man.

And human sympathy and Christian love are so interwoven and blended together that they cannot be parted from each other, and are both the outpourings and overflowings of a mind at peace with God and man. Love and sympathy, such as they rise spontaneously from our hearts, are approved of by God himself, and are His own free gifts to man, that we might comfort and help each other, and not fail

altogether or be bereft of hope in our times of earthly need.

We must not forget "slang" amongst the foremost of our barrier-breakers. Slang is the vernacular of the uneducated, and the adopted pet child of fashion; harmless in its birth and parentage, and obnoxious only when out of its own sphere. It is the livery suit of the thoughtless and the reckless, the test in many instances between the bad and the good, the earnest and the trifling.

Slang is no harmless thing, as many imagine—a toy to be taken up and laid down at pleasure; or to be tossed about from one to the other, like a ball or shuttlecock, and then quietly put on its shelf again. No; slang is a consuming flame—it burns, it stings, it corrupts; and it cannot be handled with impunity, for it leaves its

scars behind, and marks those that use it with a brand peculiarly its own. Slang is the key to laxity, and opens the doors of folly and of sin.

Some affect to couple religion with fashion, mixing up religious talk with the passing trifles and vanities of the day. This is a more serious injury to the cause of true religion and holiness, than the often erratic movements of excitement and levity, because it brings religion down to a level with common and everyday things, and lowers it in the eyes of the ignorant and worldly. Religion sanctifies and refines everything it comes into contact with, transforms everything it touches, and ennobles everything that it reflects upon; but it can no more mix with dross than the iron with the clay, or the diamond with the earth it is embedded in.

There are degrees in all errors, and a downward scale from the too ready talker to the solemn deceiver, from the thoughtless and giddy to the openly profane, and from self-deception to premeditated deceit; but surely it must grieve the earnest-minded, and increase the self-complacency of the thoughtless, when religion becomes a conversational by-play in the fashionable world.

The rich and great, like princes, seldom hear the truth. They live in exclusive circles of their own; they praise and are praised by each other; and those of a lower sphere than their own, find flattery the readiest, and, perhaps, the only way to their favour.

There is too much of unreality in their lives, and flattery and deference become soon a necessary want to them, and open

the doors of the barriers to many a deadly foe.

The nobler in mind stand aloof, and will not stoop to deal in untruth; and thus the rich and great are too often left to the mercy of those whose interest it is that their eyes should never be opened.

This may sound severe, but it is strictly true; and an unsound influence is at work in many a home, and much unhealthy action of mind and life result from it.

But, after all, the worst breakers down, or secret underminers of barriers are the compromising, the careless, and the indifferent—those who confound right and wrong together, and treat them alike, forgetful of the mighty importance of upholding justice and truth, or who look to fashion and expediency rather than to principle to guide them.

Some have not acute perceptions of truth and of moral rectitude. Indeed, moral perception may be lost altogether by want of use, or perverted and crushed by misuse, until it becomes no longer available. To those who retain their moral instincts and their common sense clear and unclouded, it is not unseldom a trial of patience to have to bear with the want of it in others, and to see expediency instead of principle their governing rule of action. Knowing themselves to be also fellow-mortals and fellow-sinners, they fear to condemn harshly, and dare not express their just indignation, because they know how much of the pride and passion of their own hearts is mixed up with it.

And oh! let any of us whose mental insight and vision is clearer than those

around us, beware lest by self-conceit or by harsh judgment of others, we fall into still greater error ourselves, and incur the just rebuke of our Lord and Saviour—to pull out the beam from our own eye before we touch the mote in our brother's eye.

We know that a day is coming when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, when right will reign triumphant, and the trial of our faith by seeming contrarieties be over; in the meantime, let none any more add to the troubles of the righteous, or hinder the kingdom of God on earth, by treating good and evil as an indifferent thing.

CHAPTER VIII.

WAR OF THE SOUL; OR, INWARD STRUGGLE.

THERE is constant war going on in the soul of man from the beginning to the end of his existence here below. The new-born babe is soon fighting with its nurse, and the strife goes on through life, until at last, after a fruitless struggle against it, man yields to his fate and dies.

The unceasing friction and endless chafing of the world keeps us in ordeal here, and is for ever exercising and proving our powers for good or evil. Does *not this* incessant inner struggle of mind,

and the war of passion almost ever going on in our own souls, shew us that our spirits here are in a state of probation and preparation for another and a higher existence ?

The latent powers and perceptions of great joy or of great sorrow that lie hidden in us ; the depths of hope and fear which, although seldom roused up here in their full intensity, are ever lying dormant in our hearts ;—these speak forcibly and plainly of a higher existence where our pent-up affections and better aspirations will have full scope and freedom.

The soul in its nature here seems never to be thoroughly at ease or at rest ; it is, perhaps, sometimes half asleep in apathy and moral darkness, but from that also there must be an awakening ; and oh, what a fearful one that sometimes is !

Even the happiness and gaiety of childhood is short-lived, and never remains long unclouded; children also have their joys and sorrows, their sunshine and their tears.

The soul of man is only at peace when spiritually risen to a knowledge of its real nature and worth, and its position in reference to another life. Then it learns to rejoice in its own high destinies, to understand itself better, and to identify itself with its glorified Head.

Do any think the news too good to be true? too great, too blessed, a thing to believe—that God cares for man, and that He has provided an everlasting salvation for us? Which is the greater mystery, the soul cared for, or this wonderful spiritual creation left to ruin and neglect by *its almighty* Maker, whilst every flower,

every insect, every lower work of His hands, has such full adequate provision made for them, and such care and fore-thought shewn for each individual want of their nature?

How striking are the analogies between nature and revelation; and how strong the assurance they give us of both being the edicts of the same almighty Hand. Every winter reminds us of the sleep of death, and every spring, with its joyful calls, of the resurrection to life; the living plant springing up from the dying seed, portraying so vividly the glorified spirit of man rising from the corruption of the grave.

Nature abounds in analogies with our present spiritual condition. The sunshine and the cloud, the storm and the calm, so rapidly succeeding each other, but each,

all-engrossing at the time, are the shadows of our mental conflicts and strife, the darkness and light, the doubts and hopes, of our own souls. And the moral laws of Providence work out our destination here on earth as unfailingly and as surely, and as certain in their results, as the more open operations of Nature, who, never stopping, never resting, brings out her appointed tasks completed at the right time.

Religion not only sanctions the inner or moral laws of nature, but she does immeasurably more; she fits into their hidden inward details; and thus linked together by God's unerring dispensation with our nature on earth, revelation leads us on to higher and more heavenly aspirations, and lights us along the road to our eternal home.

Just as the animal nature preponderates in man, so does all that is low, grovelling, and earth-born; and just as the intellectual and spiritual nature prevails, so is the mind ennobled, refined, and purified.

Nature sinking down into mere animal life, without spiritual awakening, is denominated death in Scripture, and is literally death so far as the soul is concerned. We see the full exemplification of this among the outcast and lowest heathen races of men; and when Christianity enlightens them, at once their moral sleep is broken up, and they rise as it were from the dead. They become heirs of heaven, and break through their fast-bound fetters.

The war of the soul on earth is no imaginary conflict; day by day it goes on;

and day by day we are either yielding or gaining ground in it.

And we have much to fight against—doubts and darkness within, a perverse will, temptations from without, and, too often a traitor inside our own hearts, expediency against principle. Personal inclination and present opportunity weigh down the balance of the unseen and future; time against eternity, a felt present against a less tangible mental realisation.

The cross of Christ is not an easy one to carry, until we have learnt to crucify our own self-will upon it, and not to have the additional burthen of bearing that along with us. And to give up our natural will, our own unregenerate pride and passion, is no easy task. The Hindoo swinging on his hooks, and torturing his body into grotesque postures, little dreams

of the inward wrench, the sharp internal conflicts that form the mortal combat of those he deems himself superior to in devotion.

And yet, one ray of light from above sweeps away the mist from our earthly sight ; the foretaste of the peace of God in our hearts shews us the nothingness of human happiness ; and this earnest from above reassures us of the reality of the heavenly inheritance in store for us.

Light dispels darkness, whilst we blush at our own impatience and unbelief, our little endurance, our little faith.

It is a blessed certainty that, already in this world, the children of God are different from the children of men, and their hearts ennobled and refined, sanctified and strengthened, in a manner unfelt by and unknown to others,—different from,

because immeasurably holier and higher than the thoughts of men.

As our strength is from above, let us seek it there, and rest not until we find it; and in the light vouchsafed from Heaven we shall guide our footsteps safely, and, however dark our path below, still look confidently upward.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE DIFFICULTY OF SPIRITUAL REALISATION.

THE promises of the Bible are chiefly of a spiritual nature; and yet how mighty and glorious are they; and how mighty has been their influence upon the mind of man !

There is little of this world's hope in them; indeed, our Master has told us that His kingdom is not of this world; and yet how forcibly they speak to our human nature as it is in this world !

It is as the voice of God speaking to the spirit of man, and understood only by

the inner spirit of man, and therefore not always understood, or even heard, when the spiritual life in man is deadened by the pressure of outward influences.

This occasional deadness of the mind, and want of power of spiritual realisation, is a proof, rather than the contrary, of spiritual realities; for must it not be thus when the mind is pre-occupied and overborne by outward, more vividly-felt impressions? As soon as the undue pressure from without is over, the mind resumes its sway, and asserts its superiority over the body, stamping its own identity by taking its right place again.

Spiritual truths must be spiritually felt and understood to be understood at all; and this, rightly considered, shews the actual and distinct existence of things spiritual and things temporal in contra-

distinction to each other, as regards ourselves and our present state—the inner life and the outer life of man.

False religions have also inculcated maxims of holiness and purity of life, though mixed up with much irrelevant matter; but where else but in the Bible is taught the astounding and superhuman doctrine, that the heart of man must be renewed and born again on earth to obtain light here, or a divine inheritance above?

And as the greater mass of mankind, from want of education, or from circumstances beyond their own control, are generally incapable of deep thought and reflection, or of self-guidance or self-culture, is not the Christian dispensation of simple faith and practice wonderfully adapted to their wants and capabilities?

"To the poor the gospel is preached" in very deed, and in a way that they can understand and apply.

Perhaps the contrast between the good and the bad, the religious and the irreligious, under the same depressing influences, is more remarkable in the lower than in the upper classes. Looking upwards keeps the soul of the poor man from the low and grovelling state into which so many of his fellows so helplessly and so rapidly sink.

After all, our understanding of spiritual things is not more limited in proportion than our powers of sense and vision are; and our present perceptions of sight, hearing, and memory, &c., being so limited, and our insight into present knowledge so small, is as great an evidence of Divine providence and arrangement, as

the existence in us of such powers at all. In their essence and nature, these powers must be unlimited and boundless, although in man they are purposely curtailed and accommodated to suit our present normal state. Thus by Divine decree our body is both the medium through which we exercise these powers, and also the medium by which they are checked and modified in their action.

Many of the new discoveries in science give us an insight, unknown to us before, of the latent powers and attributes of nature in respect to instantaneous communication and rapid action. This might help us to be more apt in realising to ourselves the spiritual transactions of the present as well as of the unknown and unexplored future.

The deeper trains of thought which we

sometimes fall into when asleep, and the clue to which we so vainly search after on awakening, may also serve to tell us of a deeper spiritual insight and knowledge around us and close to us, than we are ordinarily cognisant of.

In the hour of death, when the body can no longer be the medium of communication with the outer world, how often does not the departing spirit seem to receive heavenly light and perception whilst yet with us, although hovering on the confines of another world.

And where are they, the lately-departed dead?—they whom we have loved so much, whom we have seen and heard, and known so well, and who, we feel certain, are still existing somewhere? Where are they? for we cannot follow them even *in thought*. To attempt it were in vain.

We can neither understand nor realise their present state—they who so short a time ago were as part of ourselves, our loved, our familiar ones.

We can just imagine the spirit, when first parted from the body, mounting upward by an irresistible law of Providence far out of the atmosphere of this earth, and swifter than any ray of light. But upward whither? We can realise no further until we ourselves experience the mighty change.

It is difficult sometimes to concentrate our own powers of mind,—to believe, or to realise our own belief. It is even difficult sometimes to realise our own spiritual existence and identity,—that we have a soul as well as a body. It is difficult to struggle against darkness and depression of mind; nay, it is even sometimes a

hurtful effort for us to attempt to do so.

We should ever remember that, from physical causes only, our powers of mind and thought may be for a time almost incapacitated and paralysed; and that this requires patient waiting, and recognising the true origin of what grieves and surprises us, rather than any exertion on our part. Though but as a cloud and passing away, it may be a heavy one to bear whilst it lasts, and partially obscure our mental vision, and shut out the bright sunshine of hope from our eyes.

But there is one thing mercifully left us which we can always do, even in our lowest and darkest spiritual frames. We can walk humbly on, and in patient trust, wait upon God. We can follow closely after our Lord and Saviour by keeping

His commandments, by doing good to others, and by sedulously watching over our own hearts to keep them clear from malice and evil; and thus, looking upward, we can wait for light and peace to our souls; and in our Master's own good time this will be given to us.

In such seasons of trial, it is well, in particular, to recall to mind the impressive and solemn warnings of our Saviour, that if we forgive not others, we shall not ourselves be forgiven; and to root out every vestige of bitterness and anger from our hearts. Perhaps it is from some such cause, from some indulged sin of our own, that we now go mourning, and that the light of God's countenance is hidden from us.

The close practical connexion between faith in Christ and goodwill and love to

man—two doctrines apparently without relation to each other—shews the Divine origin of both. They are like some well-known laws of nature which suit into and act upon each other, whilst each is following out its own direction and impulse. Whenever the heart is touched by the full realisation of its own personal pardon and reconciliation in Christ, it opens directly in love and charity to others beyond its usual wont. The forgiven soul must needs in its joy forgive also; but in a hardened state of mind, our hearts open not to such influences.

What can be more plain than the promise made by Christ himself in John xiv, 21? Our Lord plainly and positively tells His disciples, and this to comfort and strengthen them, that when He left this *world*, which He was about to do, He

would still manifest Himself to His own people, to those who kept His commandments.

If this be not plain enough, read the two following verses, which make His meaning unmistakably clear. The apostles, not comprehending the spiritual meaning of His words, ask how He can thus reveal Himself to them only, and not to others. In answer, He again, and still more positively, tells them the same blessed truth, and gives the same glorious assurance that He will visit the hearts of His faithful followers. Read also the context, and verses before. This passage of Scripture is clear as the day, and cannot be misinterpreted by any honest reader.

And every moment of our lives we have an opportunity of serving Him and of

keeping His commandments, for we are always serving Him or not serving Him; and always either walking with Him or keeping away from Him.

And as it is but a short time before we shall see Him fully, how shall we wish hereafter that we had glorified God more on earth, borne our short-lived trials better, and submitted ourselves to His will more patiently!

“Though vexing thoughts may seem to last,
Let not thy soul be quite o’ercast;
Soon shall He shew thee all His wounds, and say,
Long have I known thy name—know thou my face
alway.”

St Thomas’s Day—Keble’s Christian Year.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE NEW DOCTRINES OF THE DAY.

UTTERLY unchristian and unsound as are these now widely-spreading doctrines of the day,—the denial of the direct inspiration of Scripture, and, *vice versa*, the assumption of self-light and self-inspiration,—there is nevertheless an important feature in them which the faithful Christian may take comfort from.

For in truth these new doctrines are but the outgrowths from the entire overthrow and defeat of raw infidelity and rationalism.

That ground has been abandoned by the

enemies of Christ as untenable; and antagonism to Christianity has appeared in a new form, more now against the religion itself than against its Divine Founder.

The daring speculations of Strauss, and other modern infidels, have succumbed in the scholastic and literary controversy which they themselves provoked, and in which for a time they revelled.

The historical proofs of our blessed religion have come out triumphantly and fully in this controversy, and will hardly be again assailed. That ground is broken up under their feet; and now a cry is raised, a war is raging, against the intrinsic merit, the Divine inspiration of the blessed message itself as it comes to us in the Bible.

The real Christian will be little disturbed by this controversy. More assured

than ever of the certainty of his faith and of his hopes, secure of the historical truth of the Divine records, he will smile at the idea of cavilling at the mode in which the Divine message is transmitted to him. Gratefully and reverently he receives it; and experience certifies to him daily more and more that it is indeed a Divine, and not a human, teaching.

As to the other equally erratic doctrine of self-illumination and self-inspiration, advocated by the same persons in antagonism to following the revealed word of God,—the looking to themselves for light, instead of humbly and prayerfully seeking it from the Author of our spiritual being,—what shall we say to this?

A few years back, and these doctrines would have been called “natural religion” in contradistinction to revealed religion, or

Christianity; now they have a new name, and are advocated by some, who still dare to call themselves by the name of Christians.

It is a sign of the times indeed—a sign of that laxity of mental discipline that has made such fearful inroads into our Christian practice and our Christian education of late years.

We may say deliberately into our Christian practice—for these presumptuous opinions are not the result of deep earnestness of mind, or of heavenward seeking, but the growth of unrestrained self-will, pride of heart, and arrogance.

A right-minded, serious inquirer after truth will not fall into such delusions—no praying Christian can do so who studies his Bible with a faithful and honest heart. *Those who are enslaved and infatuated by*

those new opinions have also already settled the question in their minds that their own understandings are safer and more enlightened guides than the written oracles of God, and consult them not.

Are not such confounding together the light of reason and of intellect—which is a natural gift of God to man—with that light of Divine inspiration which is God's own most special gift, and with which spiritual inspiration He still vouchsafes to comfort and enlighten His people? High and holy, and far above the conceptions of our mortal nature, is this heavenly light and consolation from above; and its effect upon the mind of man is ever to lay it low in adoring wonder and deep self-abasement.

CHAPTER XI.

HOME ESTRANGEMENT.

To hear young persons announcing to their parents that the clever and enlightened no longer consider the Bible an infallible guide, or that it should be taken in its literal meaning! To hear them speaking of it as a book belonging to the past, and not suited to the wants of the present age! The dull and the ignorant are, in their opinion, the only ones who still read it with reverence, and implicitly believe it,—they themselves disclaiming altogether, because they cannot understand them, its deep spiritual doctrines!

To see young people boasting of their own enlightenment—talking of their enlarged Christian views—and of following up the inspirations of their own minds, whilst they put aside the revealed word of God, and smile at the simplicity of the humble-minded but earnest Christian who still professes to follow it!

These modern views, so fearlessly and so daringly taken up, are but, as I have said before, new phases of “natural religion” in antagonism to Christianity, or revealed religion. They need no comment or refutation—their folly and unsoundness are open and manifest. Neither are they dangerous or attractive to others in general, except perhaps to a class of superficial and flighty inquirers; or to such as, looking upon head knowledge as everything, believe not in the inner and spiritual life!

How melancholy, and how strange is this !

But, oh, the solemn warning that these things should be to us, if such results can spring out of trusting too much to ourselves, and leaning on our own understanding! “The peace of God, that passeth understanding,” is not in such hearts; and the cross of Christ is not taken up or even thought of there. The fear of God is lost, and love to God changed into a love and worship of a god of their own imagination —the god of nature rather than the God of grace.

The ancient heathen made their own gods, and they then worshipped them ; our modern heathen bow down to themselves. The ancient heathen were ignorant of God, but they sought after Him *in their own way* ; these reject and make

light of His Word, which the heathen would not have done.

And in many instances in young persons, how quickly following in the train of irreligion, how quickly following in the loss of the restraining fear of God, come irreverence and disrespect to their parents! And father and mother once set at nought—their smile uncared for, their approbation disregarded—then dislike of home, of home duties and of home blessings, follows rapidly. Dereliction in every duty succeeds to this; and self-gratification, and the praise of men, regardless of right or wrong, becomes often the governing principle of their actions. Standing thus aloof from home love and home affections—the ties, so dear and sacred to others, scorned at and trodden under foot by them—refusing to bless or to be blessed.

—surely this is “youth in exile,” in self-elected exile, even at home. . .

Oh, ye that despise a mother’s teaching,
and heed not a father’s words, remember
that the fallen angels were once higher in
intelligence than you, and that they fell
through disobedience !

MOTHER AND CHILD.

The day speeds on, the day speeds on,
And one of my flock is lost and gone—
And what shall I do without that one ?

Gladly my little ones walk by my side,
And safely within my arms they hide;
But one is away and wandering wide.

False is the world and its golden hue;
But a mother’s love is deep and true,
And a mother’s love would guide her through.

Dark is her path, and her footsteps slide;
And where will she be at eventide,
When I gather my darlings to my side ? *

* Heb. ii. 18; Isa. xxviii. 18.

Rough is our path, and narrow our way,
But we 're travelling on to eternal day,
And why will she leave us, to go astray ?

Ah, why did she leave our blessed band ?
Why not travel with us to the heavenly land ?
Why not feed with us from our Father's hand ?

Hard is her heart, and her pity gone,
Her feelings are frozen, and turn'd to stone,
That thus she could leave us, to go alone !

And must she be lost for evermore ?
Oh, how will she meet the stormy hour,
And how withstand temptation's power ?

Heartless she leaves us, to toil alone—
To bear our cross before we reach our crown ;—
Whilst angels look with pitying wonder down,

To travel alone on our rugged road,
Bearing for her a heavy load,
Along the path she never trod.

O Thou ! who from Thy throne on high
Regardest human frailty,
And hear'st an injured mother's sigh,

Thy soul-reviving influence give ;
O Lord ! the wasted past forgive,
And bid an erring spirit live !

